

KNOWLEDGE

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OFFICIAL SAFETY MAGAZINE OF THE U.S. ARMY



NO
SWIMMING

GRIP OF THE RIP



ARMY STRONG

FROM THE CSM Moments Matter, Seconds Count

You never know what Mother Nature has in store: After what seemed like an endless winter, it appears we've skipped over spring and plunged straight into summer! I'm sure it's a welcome change for our Soldiers, but the short seasonal transition has put many of us leaders at a disadvantage. Since we haven't had the opportunity to ease our Soldiers into the summer mindset, we have to do like the weather and jump headfirst into our seasonal safety programs. With motorcycle and water fatalities already on the rise this year, we can't afford to delay — Soldiers are eager to get outside, and some of them may not be ready for the usual challenges summer brings.

I thought about this a lot during a recent trip to my hometown in Florida. Several local children drowned in swimming pools in just the few short weeks I was there, reminding me that tragedy can strike in mere moments. As adults, we have a tendency to turn our backs when it's "only" three feet of water or we're distracted by any number of things when we should be watching our kids. I should know, because it's happened to me. When my youngest daughter was about 5 years old, we were lounging by the pool at Shades of Green at Walt Disney World when she suddenly jumped into the water in front of us, knowing she couldn't swim. It still gives me chills to think about what could've happened if we hadn't been right there or weren't paying closer attention to what she was doing. Moments matter, and in safety, seconds count more than you know.

That's what I'd like to see our leaders emphasize this summer: Bad things can happen to good people, so take time to reflect before you execute. It takes just a second for a car to pull in front of a Soldier riding his motorcycle; one beer is one too many when you're boating or skiing at the lake. Seemingly insignificant decisions can turn a life upside down or end it completely, so we owe it to ourselves and each other to think through our plans before we act on them. By staying safe, we make our own luck instead of relying on the very bad gamble that fate will see us through.

June is National Safety Month, and I encourage all of you to take this time to prepare your Soldiers for the summer ahead. It's no coincidence our Army observes this month just as summer kicks off, since this is historically one of the deadliest times of year for Soldiers off duty. And this year, impatience could take an even greater toll if we don't get ahead of the curve. The USACRC/ Safety Center has already released its annual Army Safe Summer Campaign and will post a separate effort just for National Safety Month June 1 at <https://safety.army.mil>. These campaigns provide good information based on Armywide trends, but you know specifically what's happening in your formations. Use our materials and your knowledge as starting points to build safety programs that meet your Soldiers' needs and will see them through summer safely.

If we think positively and act responsibly, our Soldiers will too, adding up to a fun summer for both them and us. No one wants to see a preventable fatality, and putting in the time now helps ensure your unit won't be touched by tragedy. Remember, it takes only a moment for everything to change, so commit to safety from this moment forward. There's nothing wrong with play, as long as you always play it safe.

Army Safe is Army Strong!

LEEFORD C. CAIN
Command Sergeant Major
U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center



GRIP OF THE RIP

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 2 SCOTT SPECHT

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Taking an early morning swim in the ocean is a great way to start your day. If you're not careful, however, that great start could come to an abrupt and tragic end. It almost happened to me.

One morning several years ago, some of my flight school buddies and I decided to leave Fort Rucker, Ala., and spend the weekend at a friend's house in Destin, Fla. As was common for us on Saturday nights in the Florida Panhandle, we contributed pretty heavily to the local economy, spending our hard-earned W-1 pay at the local clubs and taverns. After a long night out, Sunday morning came early, and the bright Florida sun shined on my face through the living room blinds. The couch I'd crashed on suddenly didn't seem as comfortable as the night before, and more sleep was likely out of the question. What I needed now was a quick cure for my dry mouth and pounding headache.

I didn't want to disturb anyone, so I slipped out of the house unnoticed and walked down to the beach. There weren't too many people out, and I remember seeing a high-flying yellow flag with a sign next to it that stated there was no lifeguard on duty. I've always been a strong swimmer, so I thought nothing about the flag and sign.

I figured the cool water would be a quick and invigorating cure to my ailments. Without thought, I slipped off my sandals and T-shirt, leaving them in a pile on the sugar-white sand. I stepped into the pristine emerald water and dove into the first decent-sized wave that came my way. The winds were calm, the water was beautiful and I instantly felt better.

The water was shallow, and since I stand more than 6 feet tall, I could easily venture out a good distance before the bottom was out of reach. The high salt concentration in the Gulf of Mexico made swimming feel nearly effortless, and each wave of cool ocean water that broke over my face brought a little more relief to my ailment. Before long, the calming effect of the waves put me into a trance-like state. When I finally opened my eyes again, I was shocked back to reality. The beach was now several hundred feet away!

I immediately realized I was in a dangerous situation. I was alone in the water, caught in a rip current and nobody even knew I had left the house. With my heart rate and anxiety level rising, I did exactly what you're not supposed to do when in a rip current — I frantically made a beeline for the shore. I quickly realized that fighting the rip current was not going to work. It seemed like the harder I swam, the farther out I was pulled. I put down my foot in hopes of finding the bottom, but there was nothing there.

Panic was starting to set in, and I knew I needed to think quickly if I wanted to survive. I'd have to rely on my instincts, experiences as a scuba diver and the little knowledge I had about rip currents to get myself back to shore safely. I forced myself to relax and used the advantage of the salty water to gain buoyancy. I then rolled onto my back and alternated between floating (to conserve energy) and backstroking parallel with the shore. Eventually, I escaped the grasp of the current and found myself in water shallow enough that I could finally touch the bottom.

Once I was back on shore, I headed to the spot where I entered the water. I had no idea how far the rip current had pulled me until it took nearly 15 minutes of walking to get back to my shirt and sandals I'd left in the sand. As I walked back toward my friend's house, I passed the same flagpole that had been flying the yellow warning flag. The flag had since been changed to red, indicating high surf and/or strong currents. Had that flag been flying earlier, I doubt I would have risked going into the water.

I was extremely lucky that morning. I very easily could have drowned, and it may have taken a long time for anyone to realize I was missing. I learned some valuable lessons that I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to share with others:

- Never swim alone.
- Always tell someone where you are going — especially if entering any body of water.



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- If you consumed alcohol, remember that a few hours of sleep will likely not be enough time for the effects to wear off. Just because the sun is up doesn't mean you're sober.
- If you get caught in a rip current, never fight it. Remain calm and swim parallel with the shore until you are out of the current.

Rip currents are a threat to everyone who enters the ocean, especially weak or non-swimmers. According to the National Weather Service, rip currents are responsible for more than 100 drownings every year in the United States and account for over 80 percent of water rescues on surf beaches. Before swimming in the ocean, make sure you know what to do if caught in the grip of a rip current. Failure to properly prepare could leave you sleeping with the fishes!

FYI

For more information on how to protect yourself from rip currents, visit the National Weather Service's website at http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/education/yos/resource/JetStream/ocean/rip_safety.htm.

Did You Know?

Florida has a statewide warning flag system to alert beachgoers of the water conditions. Here's an explanation to what each flag means:

Double Red – Water closed to the public

Red – High hazard (high surf and/or strong currents)

Yellow – Medium hazard (moderate surf and/or currents)

Green – Low hazard (calm conditions, exercise caution)

Purple – Dangerous marine life present



RAINY-DAY RIDING

DAVID L. HOUGH

www.soundrider.com

After a million miles of motorcycling, you'd think I would know how to ride in the rain. It was only going to be a 250-mile ride over two days. The weather report mentioned a storm blowing in from the coast; but after a warm and dry summer, I was lulled into complacency.

About an hour from the start, we smashed into the approaching storm front. Torrential rain was coming down in buckets and blowing sideways. The air was filled with blowing leaves. Tree branches were snapping off and blowing across the road. The pavement was quickly coated with layers of slippery leaves. It didn't take long for me to realize I wasn't prepared for serious rain. Let me share with you several secrets I should have remembered.

Choose riding gear that's weatherproof

Riding in soggy gear is a bigger deal than just feeling miserable. Riding soggy is an invitation to hypothermia. At highway speeds, the evaporative cooling of wet riding gear can quickly chill you to the core, and your thinking and muscle control will be slower. Staying dry and warm is a big part of keeping your brain and muscles functioning.

One reliable approach to weatherproof riding gear is a fabric shell with a breathable membrane bonded to the inside. It's very helpful to have a removable insulated liner. An electric liner or vest can provide additional heat. Waterproof glove and boot covers help keep your hands and feet dry, and don't take up much space to pack. If you've been wearing open weave or mesh gear for summer rides, remember to bring along your waterproofs — either an insulated waterproof liner to wear under the shell or separate raingear to wear over the shell.

Read the surface

After my bike did the moonwalk through a puddle filled with slippery leaves, I started reading the surface more carefully. The secret is that clean wet pavement has something like 80 percent of the friction of clean dry pavement. It's those slippery areas you need to avoid — like those wet leaves in the puddle, or a dribble of diesel oil or a slippery white arrow glued to the surface.

You can assume that painted or plastic lines and markings will be slick, including crosswalks and directional arrows. Brick surfaces will be slick when wet. Railroad or streetcar crossings will be slippery, especially the plastic or wooden aprons on both sides of the shiny rails. Oil and grease on the pavement will cause water to bead or streak and may have a rainbow sheen. When you see a change in the color or texture of the surface, ride more conservatively until you can feel what's happening.

Practice smooth control inputs

The key to avoiding a slideout on a wet surface is to make all control inputs smoothly. To maintain steady front tire traction when approaching a curve, transition smoothly from throttle to brake and then ease off the brake as you lean in. As you lean the bike in, smoothly sneak on the throttle as you steer into the curve to help balance traction between the front and rear tires. An "outside-inside-outside" line will maximize the radius of turn and minimize slip. Even if you feel your tires let go for a moment, avoid that sudden disastrous instinct to snap off the throttle or jam on the brakes. If the bike can recover, it will.

Brake early

When approaching a situation where you must decelerate, brake early. It's difficult to comprehend how much braking force can be applied on the wet surface. Braking early gets the bike slowed sooner and more gradually, reducing the need to suddenly brake harder toward the end of the stop. To give yourself more time for evasive maneuvers, drop back farther behind other vehicles. The minimum following distance in the rain should be four seconds.

Take a break when it first starts to rain

High-mileage commercial vehicles tend to dribble engine oil, grease and diesel fuel on the surface. A little moisture mixed with those contaminants can create a slippery goo that really reduces traction. That's why the road seems so treacherous after just a light rain or morning dew. It takes about a half hour of steady downpour to wash the pavement clean. The clever rider takes a half-hour break when it first starts to rain, to avoid sliding out and collisions with less-than-astute drivers.



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Be Smart About Lightning

A motorcyclist is very much exposed to lightning. A motorcycle's rubber tires won't insulate it from the pavement. Lightning is so high voltage that it can travel on the surface of objects, including rubber. Enclosed vehicles such as automobiles and airplanes are seldom penetrated by lightning strikes. A motorcyclist, however, is exposed to serious injury.

If you are caught in a mountainous area during an afternoon thunderstorm, the best tactic is to get inside a building until the lightning passes. If there's no building available and strikes are getting closer (the thunderclap is less than three seconds after the flash) avoid standing under a tree. Get off the bike and lay down in a low ditch.

Editor's note: David L. Hough has authored several popular books on riding safety and served as a columnist for Motorcycle Consumer News, BMW Owners News and Sound RIDER! magazines. To support Soldier riders, Hough and Sound RIDER! Publisher Tom Mehren have granted reprint permission to Knowledge.



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WRONG SWITCH, WRONG TIME

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Ask any Soldier that has been deployed about the inherent stresses caused by the theater of war and you will surely hear the near-miss and there-I-was stories. The multitude of things that can go wrong during any deployment cause a state of constant and heightened situational awareness. The problem with this is that over long periods of time, this can lead to chronic fatigue of both mind and body. This fatigue, coupled with the dangers from the enemy and environment, can lead to disaster.

My aviation unit was about four months into a 12-month deployment, and the operations tempo was raging. It was not uncommon for our aircrews to be flying the max amount of hours our crew endurance policy would allow. Often these long flights would start during daylight hours and carry over into the evenings. The night vision goggle mode of flight during the hours of darkness required full vigilance and awareness due to limited visibility and certain illusions associated with night system flight.

This particular significant emotional event took place on a frigid February evening deep in the bowels of Iraq. Our aircrew was finishing a full day of flying and had one final stop before heading back to our own forward operating base. The FOB we were approaching was notorious for how dark and dusty it was at night. We were given clearance by the control tower to land and started our approach to what we thought was the runway. Due to the zero illumination that night, we strained to make out the landing area through our goggles.

The dust started to form around the aircraft at about 20 feet above the ground, and the landing area we were approaching disappeared. The PC was on the flight controls and called a go-around through the internal communications system and pulled in power to start a climb out of the dust. As we cleared the dust cloud during our ascent, the crew chief announced we had actually made our approach to a UAS runway that had been built parallel to the landing area to which we were supposed to land. The UAS landing area did not have the support structure to hold the weight of our helicopter. If damaged, the landing area may not have been usable for the much lighter unmanned systems.

We entered the traffic pattern again and informed the control tower of our go-around and intent to make another approach. We were cleared for the approach and started our descent. On short final, the PC asked me to turn off the heater. The intensity of the situation, coupled with fatigue and the environmental conditions, had made it extremely hot and uncomfortable in the cockpit.

The heater switch is located on the upper console above and between the heads of the two pilots. Focused outside due to the gravity of the situation and the fact we had already aborted one landing, I reached up and turned off what I thought was the heater switch. Nothing happened. The heater was still on. I thought I had accidentally turned off the vent blower, which is co-located with the heater switch, so I flipped the switch that was immediately beside the one I had just turned off. The cockpit then went black!

The aircraft started to shudder and there was beeping in our helmets. The PC landed the aircraft safely. Luckily, we were merely 10 feet from the landing area when I had inadvertently shut off both of our main generators. That's right — the first switch was generator No. 1. Nothing happened because the other generator picked up the load. The second switch was generator No. 2. We lost all lights, causing a blacked-out cockpit. The beeping was caused by the power interruption and radios being knocked offline. The generator switches were inches away from the heater and vent blower switches and identical in shape and size.

Safely on the ground and our hearts about to explode through our chests because of the near-death experience, the PC reached up and turned both generator switches back on, restoring power to the aircraft. Keeping his composure, the PC reminded me that we need to identify switches before turning anything on or off during NVG flight because of the low light levels.

Now, many years later, as a PC, I have used this experience to mentor my younger pilots. I teach them the importance of keeping their composure in high-stress situations even when exhausted. They learn that it is critical to know your equipment even in the dark. Most importantly, they learn from my mistake so they hopefully will never make the same one.



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THE BIG BANG

JAMES HAMMONDS

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For many Americans, fireworks are a summer tradition. Fourth of July celebrations seem incomplete without the rockets' red glare and bombs bursting in air. Unfortunately, some of these celebrations will end with another, less enjoyable tradition — a trip to the emergency room. By taking the proper precautions before handling fireworks, you can help ensure your personal tribute to Independence Day is a blast.

It may surprise some to learn the only difference between military explosives and fireworks is the amount of explosives filler. In the explosives community, we handle ammunition and explosives using the cardinal principle: Expose the fewest people to the smallest amount of explosives for the shortest time possible. It's also a great rule for handling fireworks.

Before even thinking about lighting your first fuse, make sure fireworks are legal to possess and use in your city and state. The National Council on Fireworks Safety's website is a good source of information on state fireworks laws. You should also always ask your local fire or police department if fireworks are legal in your area. Although fireworks may be legal in your state, there may be reasons, such as a burn ban due to dry weather, why their use is prohibited in some areas.

Once you've established that you can legally shoot fireworks in your city, make sure you buy legal fireworks. Fireworks are classified as a hazardous material and will always have a label with the manufacturer's name and directions for use. Illegal fireworks such as M-80s, M-100s and blockbusters usually aren't labeled and don't have directions. Even though banned since 1966, illegal fireworks are responsible for one-third of all Fourth of July injuries. If you know of anyone selling illegal fireworks, contact your local police department.

Unfortunately, even legal fireworks that are considered a safe choice for younger children, such as sparklers, can be dangerous. Sparklers can reach 1,800 F — hot enough to melt gold — and account for more than half the fireworks injuries to children under the age of 14. If children aren't mature enough to understand the rules regarding fireworks, they shouldn't handle them. Also, if your pets are afraid of noise or get excited and stressed easily, consider keeping them indoors or in pet crates until the fireworks celebration is over.

If someone gets hurt using fireworks, immediately go to your family doctor or a hospital. If the injury involves the eyes, do not rub or touch them. You should also never attempt to flush the eyes because some fireworks material can be activated by water. Eye injuries from fireworks are a no-wait medical decision.

Fireworks are meant to be enjoyed and help celebrate an important event in American history. If used properly, they can be safe for everyone. Teach your children the right way to handle fireworks and they'll pass it on to their children. The last place anyone wants to celebrate America's independence is a hospital waiting room.

FYI

To help you safely celebrate the Fourth of July, the Consumer Product Safety Commission and the National Council on Fireworks Safety offer the following tips:

- Always read and follow label directions.
- Have an adult present.
- Buy from reliable sellers.
- Only use fireworks outdoors.
- Always have water handy (a garden hose and a bucket).
- Never experiment or make your own fireworks.



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- Light only one firework at a time.
- Never relight a “dud” firework. Wait 15 to 20 minutes, soak it in a bucket of water and then dispose of it in your trash can.
- Never give fireworks to small children.
- Store fireworks in a cool, dry place.
- Never throw or point fireworks at other people.
- Never carry fireworks in your pocket.
- Never shoot fireworks in metal or glass containers.
- The shooter should always wear eye protection and never have any part of the body over the firework.
- Stay away from illegal explosives.

For more information about fireworks safety, statistics and state laws, visit the National Council on Fireworks Safety Web site at www.fireworksafety.com



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BOTH SIDES

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People are unpredictable. How many times have you darted across a street where there was no crosswalk? Did you look both ways first? Do you know if vehicle drivers saw you? As a pedestrian, you can't assume every driver knows your intentions. That's a lesson I learned at young age.

I was 9 years old, walking home from the last day of fourth grade with my 6-year-old sister. I was so excited about summer break and in a hurry to get home. To save time, I decided to cross the street before reaching the corner where we always crossed. Traffic was lined up at the stop sign, so the cars in the lane I was next to were stopped. I walked behind the last car and looked to the right. It was clear. I turned to tell my sister to follow me and then started running for the other side of the road without checking for traffic again. I almost made it — almost.

I heard the screech of tires and felt the bumper hit my right knee, followed by the grill and hood against my right thigh and hip. As I was propelled into the air, I hit my forearm on the top of passenger-side quarter panel. I continued to flip through the air, breaking off the antenna and mirror with my back before landing in the street.

I never even saw the Cadillac coming. The driver didn't see me either. She had just turned the corner and accelerated to 30 mph in the 15-mph school zone. She was in a hurry, too, as she raced to the school to pick up her daughter. Everything happened so fast that she didn't even apply her brakes until six feet before impact.

When all was said and done, I'd suffered a concussion and received a few cuts and scrapes. My entire body ached, but I didn't have any broken bones. I was fortunate to be alive — and even more fortunate my sister didn't listen to me when I told her to follow me. Wisely, she had stayed on the sidewalk.

After this accident, I had a new respect for cars. While the driver was in the wrong for speeding, I had to share the blame because I didn't use the crosswalk like I had every time before that day. Since then, I always look both ways three or four times before stepping into the road and constantly monitor traffic as I am crossing. When I am at a crosswalk in front of a stopped vehicle, I always make eye contact with the driver before I continue. In most states, I likely have the right of way in a crosswalk, but I never assume that a driver sees me and is going to stop. Also, when running for PT, I always face oncoming traffic and never wear headphones. If I need to answer my phone, make a call or send a text, I first step off to the side of the road. Some may call me overly cautious, but I'm determined to never be hit by a car again.

I wish this was the end of my story, but, unfortunately, several years later, the roles were reversed.

As I mentioned before, people are unpredictable. For example, how many times have you approached an intersection in your vehicle and seen pedestrians crossing even though you have a green light? How many people do you see walking or jogging in the street, oblivious to the traffic around them? How many people have walked out in front of you in a parking lot? How many kids have you seen blindly run into the street to retrieve a ball? As a driver, you can't assume a pedestrian sees your vehicle, even when you have the right of way. And in a battle of car versus pedestrian, I know all too well that the car always wins. Here's what happened.

Once again, it was summertime. I was now 16 and I had just gotten off work. Driving my mother's car, I was on my way to pick up a buddy who lived on the other side of the river. I was traveling in the right lane of a four-lane road at about 55 mph. The posted speed limit was 50 mph, so I was speeding, but not by much.

About a half-mile after crossing the long bridge that spanned the river, there was a traffic light, which was red. I had slowed to about 35 mph when the light turned green. The left lane had about six cars in it, but my lane was clear, so I started accelerating. As I began to pass the cars at the traffic light, they began to accelerate too. Just as my front bumper was even with the lead vehicle, a dark figure came across its headlights and then into mine.



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I immediately slammed on the brakes. My tires screeched and I felt a large thud. The feeling and sound of the impact sent a shiver down my spine. My bumper had hit the man's right leg and sent him tumbling through the air, landing on his head. He'd almost made it across — almost.

I stopped the car and ran back toward the point of impact. I found the man 20 feet from where we'd collided. He was a mess. Although he was laying face up, his legs were folded underneath him. But he was alive. In addition to two broken legs, his knees were shattered. He also had a broken arm and cracked ribs. He spent the next 18 months in a hospital, undergoing more than 20 surgeries to fix his legs and knees. He spent another two years in physical therapy learning how to walk again.

Although I blamed myself for the accident, the state troopers who worked the scene determined I was not at fault. The man had been drunk and was attempting to cross the poorly lit intersection despite having the "Don't Walk" signal. He was also wearing dark blue jeans and a black t-shirt and hat. Regardless, he spent eight years in legal actions against my parents in an attempt to recover damages for lost work and hospital bills. Fortunately, a judge later determined the same thing as the troopers and dismissed the lawsuit.

After this accident, I had a new respect for pedestrians. Since then, I always slow down at night when approaching an intersection, looking for pedestrians near the crosswalks. When I am at a stop sign, I always try to make eye contact with a pedestrian before they cross in front of me. Even if I have the right of way, I'll never just assume a pedestrian is paying attention. And when I see kids playing in a yard, I always slow down well below the posted speed limit. Some may call me overly cautious, but I'm determined to never hit someone with my car again.

Pedestrians and drivers must have a mutual respect for one another. After all, every day most of us are either one or the other. Whether it is texting while walking or fiddling with the GPS or radio while driving, limit the distractions when you are on the move and pay attention to the task at hand. As someone who's been on both sides, I can tell you neither one is much fun. Either one of these accidents could have ruined my life at a very young age. Don't let one ruin yours.



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DON'T RUSH ME

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 3 STEPHEN GONIFAS
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Shortly after graduating flight school, I was tasked with assisting in ferrying two of our OH-58As from Nebraska to Fort Rucker, Ala. I was excited by the prospect of a cross-country flight with a pilot in command who was not an instructor pilot. I had recently made Readiness Level 2 and was eager to prove myself to the PCs in the unit.

To prepare for the trip, I brushed up on my emergency procedures, limits, airspace and aerodynamics, including dynamic rollover. The crew brief was as normal. I was paired with a PC who was one of the lowest-time PCs in the company, but I knew he was a safe pilot and looked forward to learning from him. I let him know this was one of my first flights without an IP. This did not seem to bother him, and I was encouraged by his faith in my abilities.

The first leg went by without any problems. I flew most of the way while the PC handled the navigation and radio calls. After getting a good lunch and stretching our legs, we headed out to the aircraft. The other crew had already untied their blade and was getting strapped in by the time we got out to our aircraft. I began to hurry so we would not be too far behind them after we cranked. I didn't want the other more experienced pilots to think the warrant officer junior grade was holding them back.

We went through the checklist quickly, but did not rush it. By the time we were at 100 percent rotor revolutions per minute, the other crew was already hovering out to the runway. The PC did the before-takeoff check and made the radio calls while I started to pick up the aircraft.

At this point, I began to move more quickly than normal. Instead of taking my time, letting the aircraft get light on the skids and smoothly picking it up, I pulled in an armful of collective. I did not anticipate the change in center of gravity from the fuel we had brought on. The right skid picked up before the left and the aircraft surged to the left. I managed to get the aircraft airborne under control at a hover. The PC simply and calmly said, "Let's not do that again!"

Although this incident did not end as a mishap, it very easily could have. We were on a pad at an airport with no other aircraft around us. Had there been another aircraft close to us, we could easily have run into it. Also, because we were on flat terrain, the left skid did not get stuck. The wind was relatively calm and from the 12 o'clock position. Had any of these conditions been different, we could have easily rolled over and destroyed the aircraft and possibly lost our lives.

I learned some valuable lessons from this experience. I never pick up an aircraft faster than I feel comfortable. This is especially true if the CG has changed for any reason such as taking on fuel or a passenger. As an infantryman, we had a saying that was drummed into our heads during Expert Infantry Badge testing: "Slow is smooth and smooth is fast." I would rather be embarrassed by taking too long than because I destroyed an aircraft. I do not go into any flight believing the IP or PC will bail me out if I can't handle something. When I am at the controls, the aircraft is my responsibility. If I don't feel comfortable, I go around or set the aircraft back down.



ARMY STRONG.



WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 3 JACOB CRAUSE
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What do more than 900 combat flight hours, four deployments, over 30 presidential protective details and 22 improvised explosive devices disabled have in common? The answer is none of those experiences gave me the kind of angst as a decision I had to make in the summer of 1998. Sound strange? Read on and I'll explain.

Every unit has an NCO that stands out as a role model. In my unit, Staff Sgt. Smith* was that NCO. He was a great explosive ordnance disposal technician and I respected him a great deal. He had been my instructor in EOD school and I trusted his judgment completely. He was well liked by all and a good friend of mine.

In 1998, Smith and I were on one of those six-month peacetime deployments to Kuwait that we only dream about now. He was my supervisor, which I was happy about because he was experienced and knew what he was doing. Part of our job in Kuwait was to help the local government clean up unexploded ordnance and bulk ammunition left by Saddam's army during their hasty retreat from that country. We really enjoyed the work, and there was plenty of it to go around for everyone. On one such mission, Smith and I were working together when something happened that I'll never forget.

We'd been working all day to help clear an area around a former Iraqi ammunition holding area that had blown up as a result of the summer heat and poor storage techniques. All types of UXO littered the area. The ammunition that was safe to move was being transported by truck to a disposal location. The UXO that was unsafe to transport was destroyed in place.

It was late in the afternoon and we were all feeling tired. I don't know if it was complacency or just plain exhaustion that caused Smith to think it was OK to pick up an unexploded rocket-propelled grenade and carry it by hand to the disposal point. I was dumbfounded because a slick-badge tech right out of EOD school wouldn't think about doing something like that. It was a clear-cut unsafe act.

My mind raced as I grappled with the responsibility I had just been handed. Do I say something? Do I risk losing his respect and shattering our friendship? What if word gets out and his career is put in jeopardy? Do I want to be responsible for that? This guy was my friend and a heck of a good EOD technician. Do I want to jeopardize that for a onetime event?

The unfortunate thing about failing to speak up when you see an unsafe act is that it is usually rewarded with nothing bad happening. If you don't think so, let me ask this question. What happened the last time you saw someone doing something unsafe and you said nothing? Were they injured or killed? Odds are they weren't. I saw a study that suggested more than 600 near misses occur for every catastrophic accident. That means someone could potentially observe more than 600 unsafe acts without speaking up and never have to suffer the consequences for their lack of moral courage. Sound like a safe bet? Many people prefer to roll the dice instead of make waves. Do you?

What is not obvious from a study like this is the cumulative effect one person can have on how fast his or her unit reaches that magic number of 600. Here's how it works: Individual A sees an unsafe act and says nothing. Individual B learns by example and passes it on to Individual C, who passes it on to D and so on. If 600 really is the magic number and not just a statistical likelihood, do you think Individual A bears any responsibility what happens when his unit reaches that number?

Fortunately, the reverse can also be true. What if Individual A had done what he knew was right and made that on-the-spot correction? It's possible he could help change the culture of his unit. At the very least, he will sleep better at night. So, what did I do about Smith and the RPG? I did what we all should do — the right thing.

**Author's note: The name of the EOD technician mentioned in this article has been changed to protect his privacy.*



TWO-UP OR TWO DOWN

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 4 ROBERT HAMMON
1/180th Aviation
Kansas National Guard
Topeka, Kansas

I was raised in the country, where the lack of immediate entertainment left most of us kids looking for hobbies. Mine was motorcycles. I started riding at the young age of 5, and by the time I was 8, I'd worked myself up to the Honda XR75.

We were fortunate to live where we did. The area had a lot of wide-open space and a neighbor who owned a bunch of land. Lucky for me, he also loved motocross and built a professional track on his back 40 acres. That would become my practice track, allowing me to progress my skills through daily rides.

As I grew older, I still enjoyed motocross, but I liked girls even more. And what do teenage girls like? That's right, motorcycles! So, at 17, I purchased a GSXR 750. I knew the GSXR's capabilities, so when I first got my hands on the bike, I told myself that I was just going to cruise it. That was short lived, though. As I became more familiar with the bike, my respect for it faded. I was soon curbing the bike every chance I got, doing wheelies on the interstate and bouncing through intersections on my front wheel. Believe it or not, I never laid down the bike, which only added to my lack of respect.

One beautiful summer evening, I decided to go to a party with friends. I knew there would be girls there, so I rode my motorcycle. At the time, the movie Top Gun had set the standard for personal protective equipment when riding a bike. According to Tom Cruise, all you needed was sunglasses. So that's what I wore.

I hadn't been at the party very long when one of my friends said she needed to go to the store a few miles away. Rather than have everyone move their vehicles so she could get out of the driveway, I agreed to give her a ride on my motorcycle. I never asked if she had ever been on a bike. In fact, I really didn't give it any thought. (I later discovered she'd never been a passenger on a bike. That will soon play an important part of this tale.)

We left the party and headed toward the store. We were in no hurry, so the ride there was pretty uneventful. The ride back, however, was a different story. As we rode down the road at 40 mph, she whispered into my ear, "What does this thing got?" At that exact moment, a little devil appeared on my shoulder and said, "Let's show her!"

I didn't roll the throttle — I hammered it to the full open position. The GSXR didn't let me down either, giving me all she had. Caught up in the moment, I didn't realize I had already made several mistakes such as failing to account for the additional weight on the back of the bike. I was quickly reminded when the GSXR's front wheel left the ground. Fortunately, I quickly regained control of the bike. That misstep should have been a sign that bad things were to come, but I ignored it.

The speedometer shot up the dial as we flew down the road. Despite the fact that it was dark outside, I was still wearing my Top Gun PPE, which is probably why I couldn't see the approaching curve in the road. When I realized what was ahead, I went into a lean. I thought I had enough to make the curve, but this is where my passenger's lack of motorcycle passenger knowledge and my failure to brief her comes into play.

As I leaned the bike into the curve, she did the exact opposite, leaning hard to the outside. This caused my bike to respond in a manner that wasn't consistent with the hundreds of curves I had taken in the past. It quickly became obvious we weren't going to make it, so I rolled the bike up straight so no one went top side. With limited options, the ditch was going to be our next destination.

As the bike shot into the ditch, my motocross experience helped but didn't completely save the day. We entered the ditch to the sound of dual hydraulic brakes locking up and were immediately surrounded by a dust cloud. The rest is just of blur of sights and sounds as the bike made its way through the ditch. When we finally came to a stop, we were scared to death and thankful to be alive. I must have looked real cool standing there in that dust cloud, still wearing my sunglasses. Fortunately, no one was injured.

I learned some important lessons that day. Obviously, my thoughts on PPE and safe riding have changed drastically since my teenage years. I also gained a better understanding of how important it is that both operator and passenger are knowledgeable



and comfortable with two-up riding. Had I worried more about safety than trying to impress a girl, I might have avoided an incident that could have seriously injured us both.

FYI

Before putting a passenger on the back of your bike, consider the following guidelines from the Motorcycle Safety Foundation:

Legal Considerations

1. All state laws and requirements for carrying a passenger must be followed.
2. Some states have specific equipment requirements. Examples: the motorcycle must have passenger footrests, passengers must be able to reach the footrests, and a motorcycle must have a separate seating area for a passenger.
3. The decision to carry a child, assuming all safety and legal factors have been considered, is left to the parent or guardian. Ensure that the child is mature enough to handle the responsibilities, tall enough to reach the footrests, wears a properly fitted helmet and other protective gear, and holds onto you or the passenger hand-holds. Check your state's laws; a few states have set minimum ages for motorcycle passengers.

Operator Preparation

1. Passengers should be considered as a second "active" rider so they can help ensure that safety and procedural operations are correctly followed.
2. A passenger will affect the handling characteristics of a motorcycle due to the extra weight and independent motion.
3. A passenger tends to move forward in quick stops and may "bump" your helmet with theirs.
4. Starting from a stop may require more throttle and clutch finesse.
5. Braking procedures may be affected. Braking sooner and/or with greater pressure may be required.
6. More weight over the rear tire may increase the usefulness and stopping power of the rear brake, especially in quick stop situations.
7. Riding on a downgrade will cause braking distance to increase compared to a flat surface.
8. Extra caution is called for in a corner because of the extra weight. Cornering clearances may be affected.
9. More time and space will be needed for passing.
10. The effects of wind, especially side wind, may be more pronounced.

Motorcycle Preparation

1. The motorcycle must be designed to accommodate a passenger.
2. The motorcycle owner's manual should be reviewed for manufacturer's tips about motorcycle setup as well as any related operational recommendations.
3. The motorcycle's suspension and tire pressure may need adjustment.
4. Care should be taken to not exceed the weight limitations specified in the owner's manual.

Passenger Preparation

1. Passengers should be tall enough to reach the footrests and mature enough to handle the responsibilities.
2. Passengers should wear proper protective gear.
3. Passengers should receive a safety briefing (see No. 7 below).
4. Passengers should consider themselves a second operator and share responsibility for safety.

General Safety Considerations

1. You need to be experienced in the motorcycle's operation and have a safety-oriented attitude before taking on the added responsibility of carrying a passenger.
2. Practice low-speed clutch/throttle control as well as normal and emergency braking in a low-risk area like an open parking lot, with a passenger.
3. Use caution in cornering and develop cornering skills over time to ensure passenger comfort and safety.
4. Use caution in corners as clearance may be affected.
5. Use MSF's Search, Evaluate, Execute strategy (SEESM) to increase time and space safety margins.
6. Allow time for a passenger to adjust to the sense of speed and the sensation of leaning; speeds should be conservatively safe and reasonable until a passenger acclimates to the proper riding techniques.



7. Ensure passengers follow safety procedures:
 - a. Complete personal protective gear is properly in use.
 - b. Hold operator's waist or hips, or motorcycle's passenger hand-holds.
 - c. Keep feet on footrests at all times, including while stopped.
 - d. Keep hands and feet away from hot or moving parts.
 - e. When in a corner, look over the operator's shoulder in the direction of the corner.
 - f. Avoid turning around or making sudden moves that might affect operation.
 - g. If crossing an obstacle, stand on the pegs with the knees slightly bent and allow the legs to absorb the shock upon impact.
8. Allow more time for passing.
9. Be ready to counter the effects of wind.
10. Avoid extreme speeds and dramatic lean angles.
11. Be ready for a passenger "bump" with their helmet or with their whole body sliding forward during hard braking.
12. Have the passenger mount after the motorcycle's stand is raised and the motorcycle is securely braced. Hold the front brake lever if the surface isn't level.
13. Have the passenger dismount first.
14. Annually complete a Basic RiderCourse 2 – Skills Practice with a passenger.
15. Have frequent passengers complete a Basic RiderCourse so they can better understand the operator's task.



ARMY STRONG.



KNOW YOUR COMFORT LEVEL

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 2 BENJAMINE KAY

All Army aviators, at one point or another, have used the term “comfort level” during a crew or team brief. This is when a crewmember has reached a point where they feel uneasy or uncomfortable about weather, an approach, an engagement or anything else, they will speak up and possibly prevent a mishap. We have all reached the point in which our comfort level was exceeded; however, rarely does one say something until later. It must be that Type A personality we get accused of having. There was one night, while flying one of two AH-64Ds over one of the largest cities in Iraq, that I reached my comfort level and said something about it.

I was in the back seat of the lead aircraft, flying in support of a ground element clearing a small neighborhood. After a couple of hours circling the area, I noticed that to the west the sky appeared cloudy. It was difficult to tell under FLIR exactly what it was, but I knew it wasn't normal.

We contacted the local weather briefers via radio and they assured us there was nothing expected to come in and affect us. But 15 minutes later, we could see it was getting closer. At that point, we called the weather briefer at another airfield west of our location. They reported one-quarter mile visibility due to a sandstorm. We then reported this to the other crew so they would expect to possibly land sooner than planned.

Once we could see the ground start to disappear under the wall of dirt a few miles away, I made the call. I had reached my comfort level. The front-seater reached his point just after I did. There was no way to tell the density of the dust cloud, nor did we know how fast the winds were moving. Rather than become a liability, it was time to land.

Of course, trying to convince the company commander in the other aircraft took some work. He wanted to stay and support the ground unit's move back to their combat outpost. As much as I wanted to do the same, everything told me we needed to get on the ground — and fast. Otherwise, their road march back to the COP might turn into a search and rescue for us.

As we turned final for landing, the west side of the FOB was no longer visible. No time for fuel, just take it to parking. By the time we shut down the engines, we were engulfed in the dust cloud. Staying out just a few more minutes could have put us into an emergency situation. Even the crew chief who recovered us mentioned he was worried we weren't going to make it back soon enough.

We all have limits, and often times those limits are pushed, especially in combat. I had to weigh the risk of the oncoming weather against continuing our support mission. Fortunately, we made the correct decision. With the conditions encountered, we would have not been able to function as needed for the ground element. Not only that, but we would have put ourselves in an emergency situation that could have been catastrophic. Instead, we were able to continue supporting those who rely on us, and returned back to the states with everyone we left with.



ROAD TO RUIN

HAROLD HUCKABAA
U.S. Marine Corps
Ladera Ranch, Calif.

It was a midsummer afternoon. I had been in the Marine Corps about seven years and was a field artilleryman serving with India Battery, 3rd Battalion, 11th Marines at Camp Pendleton. My unit had just completed a hugely successful three-week trip to the field at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms. All of the Marines were ready to get back to our base in sunny Southern California, which was a lot different from the desert living we'd experienced over the past few weeks. The final step was to drive our vehicles home safely. The trip would take about six hours to complete with a couple of rest stops along the way.

Before departing, we had a thorough safety brief for all drivers and assistant drivers. We all knew our first stop would be at the two-hour mark so we could stretch and conduct a vehicle check and walk-around for about 15 minutes. That stop went off without a hitch, and we were back on our way. The next rest stop would be at a raceway in Fontana, Calif. We were all looking forward to this one because the raceway snack bar was going to open for us so we could purchase hotdogs, hamburgers and sodas. Once again, the rest stop went smoothly.

With our break time now over, we had another safety brief to notify all drivers and assistant drivers about the remainder of our trip. All was going well until we got on the section of freeway that led to the I-215 ramp en route to Camp Pendleton. Ahead of us, a 5-ton truck carrying an M198 howitzer got on the highway in traffic and moved over to the third lane of travel. We were able to remain in the slow lane, which was good because the ramp to I-215 was just ahead.

As the convoy ahead of us took the ramp, the 5-ton was still in the third lane. We'd always been told that if we were going to miss a ramp that we should go around and backtrack. The driver did not heed that warning and attempted to cross three lanes of traffic to make the ramp. Unfortunately, he did not take into account what was that he was towing a 16,000-pound gun with tires that stuck out on both sides. The truck made the exit; the gun did not.

We watched helplessly as one of the tires hit the guardrail, causing the gun to become airborne. What happen next was unbelievable. The gun was hooked to the truck by a safety chain, which did not break. After the gun struck the ground, the truck began to flip over and over. In the back of the truck was gun gear, weapons, personal gear, a spare tire and, worst of all, nine Marines.

We pulled in behind the truck, which had come to rest upside down. Our primary concern was for the Marines. All had suffered varying injuries, including broken bones and deep gashes on their heads. One Marine was trapped under the spare tire bracket. We had to hook up the 5-ton to our truck and pull it far enough to free him. All were taken to local hospitals, where most were treated and released. In the end, six Marines were put out of the Corps due to the accident. I never again saw the Marine who'd been pinned under the truck.

The Marine Corps learned a valuable lesson this day. From that point forward, Marines were no longer allowed to ride in the back of a truck. They are now bused to and from training areas off base. Seeing firsthand the destruction caused by one unsafe act during a simple peacetime drive-back to base was an important reminder that we must be aware of our surroundings at all times.

YOUNG AND DUMB

DUSTIN LEWIS

Redstone Arsenal, Ala.

There I was, young and dumb, riding a four-wheel all-terrain vehicle with no helmet, goggles, gloves or any other personal protective equipment. There were about eight of us that day, and we were out for a casual ride. Of course, we brought along girls, which meant there was no limit to our efforts to impress. We were out of control as we sped up and down the side of a mountain, never giving a second thought to the fact that we were endangering not only our lives, but also the girls' lives.

As you can imagine, the terrain on the side of the mountain was extremely rough and covered in ditches and boulders. What's more, just off the side of the trail we were riding was an extreme drop through trees and more boulders. We had ridden this trail several times, so we were confident in our abilities to handle whatever came our way. Maybe we were a little too confident, but more on that later.

We rode into the evening, doing tailspins, doughnuts and probably just about any other wild move you can imagine. Once satisfied we'd sufficiently burned up the trail, we decided to head back to the top of the mountain to continue our reckless riding. If you've ever ridden an ATV, you know it isn't very difficult to flip it over backward. Somehow, though, we made it back to the top safely, where the real "fun" began.

The top of the mountain offered tons of areas for playing in the mud, jumping hills and racing, and we were determined to do it all — still paying no mind to the dangers we were encountering. Eventually, we started a game of four-wheeler dare. The rules were simple: Someone dares another rider to do something challenging on their ATV. That person can either accept the dare or be ridiculed by the rest of the guys. With the girls there, turning down a dare wasn't an option. This is where I got in trouble.

There was one hill no one would jump because it was just too big. With everyone else passing on the challenge, I saw this as an opportunity to impress the girl that was with me. It was a bad idea, to say the least. I backed my ATV, lined up the jump and rolled the throttle. Everything was going smoothly until I reached the top of the hill for takeoff. At the last second, I noticed a root bulging out from the left side of the top of the hill. It was too late.

The root caused my four-wheeler to rotate as I flew 10 feet off the ground. I knew if I stayed on the ATV that the end product wasn't going to be good, so I made the split-second decision to bail. I dropped to the ground like a rock, the impact knocking me unconscious for three or four minutes. Fortunately, the only real injury I suffered was to my bruised ego. My four-wheeler wasn't as lucky. One of the front wheels had been bent underneath the ATV when it crashed to the ground. Needless to say, we had to pull it back to the truck.

That day, I was extremely fortunate. This was a first-class near miss. It was completely stupid to not wear any PPE when riding. All it would have taken is a small rock to have been lying in the spot where my head struck the ground and I wouldn't be here writing this today. What I want you to take away from this is life is very fragile; the least we can do is take the proper safety precautions for ourselves and others. While we can't prevent every bad thing from occurring, we can at least do our part to mitigate the risk and minimize the severity.



ARMY STRONG.



WHAT NO-FLY ZONE?

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 3 JACOB M. ROE III

B Company, 4-227th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion
Fort Hood, Texas

During the fifth month in a 15-month deployment during Operation Iraqi Freedom 06-08, I was serving as a company instructor pilot in my attack reconnaissance battalion. We had been in country long enough to begin establishing a good battle rhythm. Our mission for the day was a two-ship armed reconnaissance patrol in our sector designed to prevent and identify insurgent activity at known hot spots. The crew mix had me in the trail aircraft. The lead crew consisted of a 1,700-hour pilot in command in the backseat on his second tour in country. He was paired with a 700-hour co-pilot gunner on his first tour in country.

We conducted our normal briefing at the tactical operations center followed by our team brief, where we collected weather, NOTAMS, discussed our scheme of maneuver and completed our individual crew briefs and then headed out for pre-flight of the aircraft. The only thing to note from our normal routine was that we briefed for a possible follow-on VIP escort mission and that weather was going to begin deteriorating after nightfall. We were scheduled to be down well before the weather, but we agreed to watch it closely in case our schedule unexpectedly was extended.

The normal mission set went as planned with no significant events until about two and a half hours in, when we got our mission change from the battalion for the VIP escort. Since it was already so late, we had assumed the escort had been scrubbed but knew we could complete it as long as the Black Hawks were on their timeline.

We verified our link-up point and headed toward an outlying forward operating base to pick up our Black Hawks. We had worked with this battalion, but I still opted to land and conduct a face-to-face multi-ship mission brief. We updated the weather, which was forecast to be good through ETA plus one hour after our mission timeline.

Our formation took off on time and we had about a 20-minute flight en route to our final destination. With the sun lowering on the horizon and a haze in the air, the visibility began to decrease to the minimum required for VFR flight. I called the formation air mission commander in the Black Hawk and asked if they still had good visibility to continue. He replied, "We can make it."

Closing within 10 miles of our final destination, my front-seater noticed our approach path was going to take us through a marked no-fly area on our digital map. The no-fly was for a JLENS observation balloon which could be anywhere from 150 feet above ground level up to 800 feet AGL. It was definitely in our vertical path since we were currently holding 500 feet AGL. I told him to call the Black Hawk and verify they were aware of the hazard. After what seemed like 20 minutes, which was actually closer to 10 seconds, they radioed back that they had no visual on the JLENS and were not aware of the no-fly. I radioed and told them to make an immediate right turn of 20 degrees, which they promptly accomplished. We circumnavigated the no-fly and successfully completed the mission without further surprises.

With hindsight being 20/20, I now realize a couple of important things I should have considered to ensure we did not have such a close call. First, don't allow your overconfidence to get yourself and team in a situation where you should just return to base and continue the mission another day with better visibility. Second, even if you are not the lead aircraft in a formation, remember that as a PC of your aircraft, you are ultimately responsible for where your aircraft flies.



ARMY STRONG.



ACCIDENT BRIEFS

AVIATION

OH-58DR

Class A

The crew was conducting takeoff during night vision goggle environmental training when they experienced dust conditions. The aircraft entered an uncontrolled descent and contacted the ground hard. The aircraft came to rest upright but sustained separation of the tail rotor and vertical fin.

AH-64D

Class B

The aircraft experienced rotor speed exceedance (132 percent) during descent for landing. The crew was able to land without further incident.

The aircraft lost altitude while on final approach and contacted the ground with the tail wheel. The aircraft sustained damage to the tail and left main landing struts, as well as to the gun turret and rear airframe mounts.

GROUND

Personnel Injury

Class A

A Soldier died from injuries after an apparent fall from a 200-foot incline. He was found unresponsive by a group of hikers.

A Soldier died after falling out during a foot march.

A Soldier was killed when a tree limb fell on top of him. Three other Soldiers were also injured.

A Soldier collapsed and died while participating in a two-mile unit run.

A Department of the Army Civilian was killed when the commercial mower he was using overturned on a downgrade, pinning him underneath.

DRIVING

PMV-4

Class A

A Soldier was killed when he apparently lost control of his vehicle, left the road and entered a wooded area.

A Soldier died in a vehicle collision while on PCS leave.

A Soldier died when he turned his vehicle in front of an oncoming SUV.

A Soldier was killed and another seriously injured when their vehicle crashed for unknown reasons.

PMV-2

Class A

A Soldier died after his motorcycle struck a telephone pole.

A Soldier was killed when he crashed his motorcycle in a curve and was ejected.

A Soldier was killed when he struck a barrier on an interstate access ramp.

A Soldier was killed when his motorcycle struck the rear wheel of the civilian motorcyclist he was following.

